



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Stephen D. Isler
COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jason W. Papanikolas (Mayor Pro Tem)
Amanda M. Dewey
Jeffrey Jay Osmond
Ethan D. Sweep

Worksession Minutes November 4, 2019 | 7:00 pm

Present were Mayor Stephen Isler, Mayor, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jason Papanikolas, Councilmembers (CMs) Amanda Dewey, Ethan Sweep, and Jeffrey Jay Osmond. Also present were Clerk Kerstin Harper, Assistant to the Town Manager Yvonne Odoi, and citizens. Town Manager (TM) Maria Broadbent had an excused absence.

1. Announcements

There were none.

2. Discussion Items

Resident survey: CM Dewey said this is an opportunity for the Council to take a final look at the resident survey before it is mailed out. First, she asked the Council's approval for increasing the sample size from 100 to 200 households, and prizes to win in a lottery, into which all returned surveys will be entered, from 4 to 6 at \$50 each. The Council had no objections. Second, a random sample of residents has been drawn and provided to Assistant to the Town Manager Odoi, who will mail them out. The survey comes in an English and a Spanish version. If the survey is needed in another language, a translation will be furnished at the time when a request is received.

CM Dewey asked the Council to review the draft survey tonight to make it shorter as this would increase the likelihood of residents filling them out and returning them. In discussion, the Council agreed that survey questions should be organized in a logical way, with some advocating for the use of headers. The following topic sections were discussed:

- Demographic questions;
- Satisfaction with Town services;
- Residents' communication preferences;
- Support for Town initiatives;
- Support for sustainability and livability initiatives;
- Questions from Town organizations;

CM Dewey summed up that she will rework the survey based on tonight's discussion, then submit it to Council by mid-week with a 24-hour period for last minute comments. She plans for the survey to be sent out to residents at the beginning of next week, asking recipients to return it by the end of November. Reminders to return the survey will be sent in early December and January. Additionally, it was decided to include the Spanish version of the survey in the initial mailing but not in the reminder notices.

Joan Hayden, Seminole Street, noted that there appear to be no questions from the Seniors Club or topics relating to seniors' concerns. She offered to draft questions targeted at seniors to include in the survey. The Council replied that the Seniors Club was asked to submit questions for the survey, but they did not.

While the Council is interested in the opinions of seniors, the cost of including a set of senior-focused questions is fewer people wanting to answer a longer survey. This survey is intended to be a quick general probing of "how the Town is doing in providing services." The coming decennial census and possible future surveys can help delve more deeply into perceptions of the Town's different populations.

Litter signage: CM Dewey said she received an inquiry from residents asking if the Town could post "do not litter" signs around Town, possibly including any applicable fines. She would like the Council's opinion before getting more information on litter regulations and the cost of such signs. Prince George's County offers a grant that may cover the cost of such signs. The Council had no objections. Additionally, she would like to explore obtaining a grant offered by the County in partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Trust to mark storm drains with stencils or art projects. The Council expressed interest in public art to draw attention to storm drains and supported requesting staff help for these initiatives.

Vote by mail: Mayor Isler explained that TM Broadbent provided a memorandum to address the concerns of the Town's Board of Election Supervisors about adding a vote-by-mail option to the election process. Concerns range from reliability of the U.S. Postal Service for delivery of mailed ballots, ballot design, voter education, verification of voter signatures, and additional time needed by election judges to process mailed ballots.

TM Broadbent has spoken with several officials to clarify requirements for voting by mail. College Park's USPS Election Mailing Coordinator Stanford Gibbs gave advice on the handling of mailed ballots and will provide guidance to ensure compliance of ballot envelopes with USPS election mail standards. Prince George's County Board of Elections Administrator Alisha Alexander confirmed that Boards of Election in Maryland do not verify voter signatures on any ballots. She believes that voting by mail will require fewer resources and welcomed a Prince George's municipality being a pilot. Rockville's City Clerk provided information on implementing Maryland's first vote by mail election. Rockville will rely only on mailed ballots to elect its Council. Voted ballots will be returned to designated secure mailboxes at city hall.

TM Broadbent offered several recommendations in the event a mailed ballot option is approved by the Council at the November Town meeting. Recommendations include improving voter outreach and education; publicizing election judge positions; establishing a USPS business reply permit for returning mailed ballots; and setting up a locked ballot box or mailbox for dropping off mailed ballots.

In discussion, CM Sweep, MPT Papanikolas and CM Osmond expressed reservations about rushing into implementing the vote by mail option for this election cycle against the recommendations of the Board of Election Supervisors. Mayor Isler said he would like to have a timeline and cost analysis for implementation to see if it is feasible. CM Dewey said the Council needs to ensure that it is not involved in operational details beyond deciding whether or not to move forward. She is in favor of moving forward and thinks TM Broadbent's memo lays out how it can be done. All agreed that increased voter education and outreach should occur, regardless.

Clerk Harper said, if the Council moves forward with an advertising and education campaign as well as voting by mail, it would be hard to tell which of these efforts caused a presumed greater turnout. Further, the Board of Election Supervisors, having read TM Broadbent's memorandum, remain concerned about pushing ahead with the vote by mail system. They prefer to watch how Rockville's election turns out and look at 2022 for implementing a vote by mail option in Berwyn Heights with more time for planning.

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, commented the Town may want to focus on publicizing the already existing absentee voting system as a way to make voting more convenient. After further discussion, the Council decided to hold off on implementing a vote by mail option but asked to be kept abreast of voter outreach and education. Particular attention should be paid to the absentee voting option.

Legislative dinner attendance: Assistant to the Town Manager Odoi said, to date, the following representatives have confirmed attendance for the Town's November 6 legislative dinner: Senator Pinsky, Delegate Healy, appointed Delegate Nicole Wilson, and County Councilmember Glaros. Delegate Washington has not yet replied, and School Board Member Thomas may be busy. All Councilmembers RSVP'd for the PGCMA legislative dinner to be held on December 5.

3. Minutes

There were none.

4. Department Reports

Mayor Isler said Halloween went off without incidents. The cold weather held off and many families participated. CM Sweep said that curbside leaf collection has started. Residents are requested to deposit leaf piles near the curb but not in the street and not to park in front of the leaf piles they want have picked up. CM Dewey said she saw many great costumes on Halloween. On Sunday, she had fun attending the Recreation Council's bluegrass concert. The Turtle Heroes string band played to a full house. Upcoming events include the Historical Committee's fall reception on November 10 and the Tree Lighting holiday party on December 7.

6. Town Council Schedule

The Council reviewed the upcoming Town Council schedule. The next PGCMA meeting on November 14 will be held jointly with Montgomery County. CM Dewey plans to attend. Town offices will be closed for Thanksgiving Thursday and Friday as well as for the Christmas and New Year holidays.

CM Dewey noted that the Green Team and Volunteer Fire Department hosted a joint post-Halloween cleanup. The highlight was dropping pumpkins from the ladder truck. The smashed pumpkins will be composted in the community garden.

7. Citizens Discussion

There was none.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk